

A CATHOLIC IN POLITICS

THE EARL OF IDDESLEIGH

MY family were Church-and-State Tories of an untheoretical, moderate sort. Eldest sons 'went into politics' and younger sons 'went into the Church'. A religious outlook was taken for granted; the religion was very sincere; so were the politics.

They served God according to their light and the King according to their light. The lights were not as dim as some people now suppose. My grandfather, a man of unostentatious piety, was well-read in theology. He was also interested in social reform and played a part in founding schools for the poor and the first reformatories.

It is not easy to convey the quality of 'integration'. Grandfather went to Church on Sunday where the parson prayed for 'the High Court of Parliament'. He went to Parliament on week-days, and heard another parson open proceedings with a prayer for the Church. Life had a rhythm. He was a good Churchman in Politics; *not* a Churchman *and* a politician.

Integration bred integrity. He was once discussing some political problem with his family and friends. A certain ingenious course of action was suggested. Grandfather's voice and manner did not change in the least; he said: 'Yes, but that would not be right'—and went on calmly to discuss other possible lines of conduct. The unlucky suggestion was disposed of in six quiet words.

The integration was of course closely connected with the idea of the 'Establishment of the Church'. 'Establishment' had a meaning in the nineteenth century which it has almost entirely lost today. Catholics had been admitted to Parliament before my Grandfather's career commenced: the 'Jew Bill' came when he was a new-comer to politics: as Leader of the Commons he fought hard, but unsuccessfully, to exclude Bradlaugh. It is arguable that the Enabling Bill of the 'twenties' and the Episcopal permission to clergy to use the Revised Prayer Book (rejected by Parliament) in the 'thirties' of our century, deprived 'Establishment' of all real meaning.

As a convert to Catholicism, I found no difficulty in achieving an 'integration' that had no connection with 'Establishment'. I now belonged to the real historic Church of the English people; the Church which shaped our political institutions—for our Parliament is no mere 'Liberal' Assembly—it is of medieval origin and retains many medieval features. Succeeding to a seat in the House of Lords a few months after I was received, I met Catholics in Parliament who found it perfectly natural to be good Catholics and good Englishmen: Lord Fitzalan, Francis Blundell, and others in different parties. If we had difficulties, if we found suspicion and occasionally dislike among our political associates, were we not by that very fact nearer to St Thomas More?

St Thomas More, indeed, might typify the 'integration' of a Catholic in the political world. He was essentially an English Catholic—and even a *modern* English Catholic. He was, I think, the first commoner and layman to sit on the Woolsack; the first man to owe a great position in the state solely to his legal and political talents, without benefit of noble birth or clerical dignity... one might say, the first 'politician' pure and simple. One might go further and suggest that Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell stand for the best and worst sides of political life in England.

It therefore seemed, and still seems, to me perfectly natural and in the tradition of my country and my family to be a Catholic politician.

Most of the work of Parliament consists in applying the principles of justice to the issues that arise. The ordinary politician is concerned rather with shaping and amending legislation than with its initiation. It is not necessary that he should have theories as to the 'perfect state'; his ordinary job is to introduce the highest degree of relative perfection into the state as he finds it. Every act of justice, every attainment of a relative perfection mirrors the justice and perfection of God. The relation between County Councils and County Borough Councils should be as harmonious as the relations between the nine choirs of angels. A Town and Country Planning Bill should reflect the order and freedom of the many mansions of heaven. A Children Bill should bear the impress of Christ's care for 'the least of these my brethren'. The day-to-day work of Parliament evidently affords innumerable opportunities to the Catholic politician.

But, you may object, this sort of thing can be done as well by non-Catholics and non-Christians. Yes, but that does not make justice and charity any the less Catholic virtues. The Good Samaritan had more justice and charity than the priests and Levites. All I know is that I have the assistance of the sacraments, and therefore should at least have a more perfect intention in these matters. A Catholic politician ought, obviously, to be more single-minded, less personally ambitious, more hard working than others in his profession. It is a high ideal, at any rate.

The question of 'party' politics is somewhat less pressing and immediate in the House of Lords than in the Commons. Yet most of us must face it: the cross-bencher will be a rarity in any political body. The Catholic politician must make up his mind which party seems to him rather nearer the 'Kingdom of God and its justice', and work honestly with and for that party, as much as he can. It is probable that a Catholic, having fewer illusions and a more 'total' outlook than other men, will tend to moderation in his political views. The presence of good Catholics in other parties than his own will moderate the bitterness of party strife for him. He will hardly believe that the mere victory of his party will set Society right—a delusion common enough among other party men. But if he feels that his party, on the whole, stands for an ideal more just than the others, he will tend to believe in and follow his leaders, especially on matters in which he has no special competence, while in matters which he knows about he will strive to influence party policy. All parties permit 'abstention' from the division lobby on conscientious grounds; they vary in their attitude towards a man who votes against the party whip. Yet even the strong discipline of Labour did not stop John Scurr from doing his Catholic duty on a famous educational occasion.

This party system of ours has after all great merits. The Book of Job tells us that Satan himself was allowed to put his 'party case' in the High Court of Heaven. We politicians are no angels—weak and frail and stupid enough, God knows (much worse than men in other walks of life?). We seem to need the systematic criticism that 'party' provides. We have, I suppose, greater temptations than other men—at least, when we are in office; it is good for us to know that several hundred intelligent, well-informed, experienced men in opposition are quite determined that our sins shall find us out. 'If you can't be good, be careful'.

But that is too cynical. There is no real sense in which each House of Parliament is a 'Chapter'. In my political life there have been two big 'scandals'—(not a bad record for any body of men). Parliament's deliberations in both cases were a model of sound Christian practice—the debates would not have disgraced a religious community. There was a real hatred of the sin and love of the sinner. The correction was just and merciful, and precautions were taken to avert future temptation. The vulgar impression that politics is a 'dirty business'—which seems particularly prevalent among Catholics—is largely due to the impression which the Marconi scandal (forty years ago) made on Belloc and Chesterton. That was a serious affair, and badly handled. Is it forgotten that Parliament has now established a far superior system of Inquiry which is put into action, almost automatically, when serious charges are made?

It is true that the country sees the party system at its worst when an election comes. Politicians still make the mistake of 'playing down' to the constituents—and the play is sometimes pretty low! But even there we are improving. The last General Election was a grave, sensible consultation of the people—and the people appreciated it and voted as never before.¹

I suppose that I act 'as a Catholic' in some special (but not exclusive) sense when I have to state 'the Catholic position' in Parliament—speaking on Divorce or Euthanasia or some such moral question. But remember that what I state (nearly always) is Natural Law—not really a 'denominational point of view' (as Parliament thinks). It is significant that on these moral issues I stand for the values which my Anglican forefathers accepted without question, and which many Anglicans today are questioning—thank God, not all of them. There is naturally a good chance of some Anglican support. Today, there are a couple of excellent Archbishops in the House—much better men than some of their predecessors; and a 'faithful remnant' among the other bishops and laymen.² There are a few good, sound, 'converted'

1 As for a 'Catholic' party—my chief objection to 'P.R.' is that it would give a chance for such a party to arise! We should be in a tiny minority, usually in uneasy alliance with a large and alien party that would have little understanding or sympathy for us; while the other large parties, losing any hope of the Catholic vote, would ride roughshod over us. Is it not a fact that 'Catholic' parties abroad have arisen, not to express Catholic social principles, but in reply to an anti-clerical spirit to which Britain is a stranger?

2 But I wonder whether Anglicanism would not be stronger in the House of Lords if the bishops were *not* there. Anglican views might command more Parliamentary agreement;

nonconformists, as well, whose help is sometimes valuable. Still, I do not feel much lack of continuity between the ordinary round of parliamentary work and these special 'Catholic' speeches. Most peers are 'specialists' on some subject of other: I 'specialise' in moral theology and Catholic truth. I would not admit that I am *more* a Catholic on these special occasions than on any other motion on which I may declare such knowledge as I have and the truth that is in me.

Besides, even on 'secular' subjects, we have a body of Catholic principles to guide us. The Church's teaching throws light on all sorts of questions—economic, industrial, social. The great encyclicals are not often directly applicable to current problems—but they are in the background of our thought; Catholic teaching guides our approach to many questions which Parliament discusses—and we are not always on the losing side! Thus, on the Children Bill, we stood, successfully, for as large a measure of parental right and religious teaching as the (very difficult) circumstances permitted. We obtained—not all we wanted, but—a considerable measure of protection for the unmarried mother in the latest Adoption Act.

In Foreign Affairs, the Catholic politician will set before his eyes the ideal of *Pax Christi in Regno Christi*. He cannot be a mere pacifist, internationalist or nationalist; he can never accept a world order in which the Gospel cannot be preached to all nations. He may have to acquiesce, for a time and to avert greater evils, in many alliances: but he can never, for example, accept a world divided between a godless East and a free West. I regard it as a primary and essential Catholic duty today to assist in the building up of strong armed forces in the West.

In domestic affairs, we should make up our minds about the Welfare State. There is a school of Catholic thought that regards it with extreme suspicion; personally, I can find no Catholic authority against, and much in favour of, the Welfare State. The relief of the sick and poor by Government action seems to me to be in line with the tradition of the royal saints—Edward, Henry, Stephen and Lewis—who founded hospitals and schools with public money, curbed the wealthy and powerful and if they were put, as ours are, by well-instructed or well-briefed laymen. I think that Archbishops are better heard outside, rather than in Parliament.

Cardinal Bourne once told me he considered it would be a great mistake for him to sit in some 'reformed' House—as is often suggested by theorists.

defended the poor. When our evil and particularly adulterous generation comes to be judged, I believe that our social institutions will plead in our favour. But as Catholics we shall guard against any complacent belief in the 'perfectibility of man' through these corporal works of mercy. We must do all we can to ensure that the greatest possible measure of Christian truth is taught to all children—not ours alone—in the state schools: that godless medical methods are kept out of the hospitals and clinics and that relief of poverty does not infringe the dignity of the individual. Thank God, we are not alone in having these ideals—though perhaps we formulate them more clearly.

But we shall be more particularly interested in maintaining, within the Welfare State, a place for that charity which is private and personal—and no one in his senses doubts that within and alongside the State system there are going to be vast opportunities for charity—personal service perhaps rather than, yet not excluding, almsgiving. It is obviously a vital—perhaps the most vital—task of any Catholic in politics today to ask what place the Catholic charities, secular and religious, are to find inside or in co-operation with the Welfare State.

The Catholic schools are a part of the State's educational structure and we can reasonably hope for some improvement in grants. Good use was found for our Catholic orphanages in the Children Act—and many of these orphanages will become far better and happier places as a result of the Home Office inspection they now receive. The Catholic hospitals are outside the Health Scheme—for the present, at least—but they are taking an overflow of State patients, and may come to take more. The State provides Chaplains for Catholic soldiers and Catholic criminals; there is a possibility that a Chaplaincy scheme for young workers, for students or for holiday camps may one day commend itself. The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council gets considerable grants (and needs more); it will be a recognised part of our social life. Religion has got to play a bigger part still in the Juvenile Delinquency problem.

The fact is that the traditional American notion of 'Separation of Church and State' has gone by the board. 'Separation' could exist in a society in which 'the rights of private property' were unquestioned and the state undertook minimum functions. It cannot exist in a 'Welfare State'—it must be replaced by 'inte-

gration'. Consider the question of ecclesiastical property. In the nineteenth century a 'squire' had a perfect right to give or sell his mansion to a religious community; and the community held their property on exactly the same tenure as the other squires. It is still the case today; but the whole position is bound to be affected (and I think sooner rather than later) by the disappearance of the squire class. We are approaching a condition in which most big country houses will be owned either by Local Authorities, or by some such 'para-State' institution as the National Trust: or by Religious. Already one hears of Religious Orders competing with Local Authorities for some big mansion or other—a situation fraught with peril. The Catholic politician will need all the grace and wisdom he can obtain if this problem is to be solved on twentieth-century lines. To think in nineteenth-century terms of 'the rights of property' will get us nowhere. But so much integration has been achieved in other fields, so much goodwill has been shown to us by our separated brethren, that we may have every reasonable hope of finding an integral solution of this problem also.

We are back, then, at 'integration'—and on a wider scale than that personal integration with which my article began. We shall certainly need integrated Catholic politicians to achieve any tolerable Church-State relationship. We shall not achieve more than a tolerance and temporary basis for their common existence. Bernard Shaw, as a young man, invented a Catholic priest, and made him speak of heaven—'In my dreams it is a country in which the State is the Church and the Church is the people'. An older and wiser Shaw quoted a real Catholic priest. 'In your play I see the dramatic presentation of the regal, sacerdotal, and prophetic powers, in which Joan was crushed. To me it is not the victory of any one of them that will bring peace and the Reign of the Saints in the Kingdom of God, but their fruitful interaction in a costly but noble state of tension.'

EDITORIAL NOTE

LORD IDDESLEIGH'S 'A Catholic in Politics' is the first of a series of *Personal Views*. Subsequent contributions to the series will deal with Catholics and Law, Journalism, Music, the Stage, the Universities, the Novel, etc.: The contributors will include Compton Mackenzie, Douglas Woodruff, Professor Hilary Armstrong, Ernest Milton, etc.: The articles do not necessarily represent the opinion of BLACKFRIARS.